



# ELSAH HISTORY

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## ELSAH'S FIRST CITIZENS

The first permanent residents of what is now Elsie were Addison Greene and his wife, Amanda Hoyt Greene. They apparently arrived in the little valley in 1847, building at least one log house and cutting wood to sell on the river. The Greenes' house is the core of the present Riverview House, as may be seen from some still visible log beams in the basement. The original house occupied what became the livingroom in the later construction.

It is difficult to imagine what the valley was like at the time. Probably it had already acquired its early name of Jersey Landing, and if so, there was probably a rough road leading down through the valley to the river already. This is all surmise, based on the Greenes' assumed motivations for settling in that particular hollow.

Elsie hollow, of course, had its advantages. First, it afforded a direct route from the Jersey County farms to the river. Its hills were not steep, as those at Eminence, located a mile downriver and settled briefly from 1828 to about 1834, had proved to be. By locating the Elsie road on the shoulder of the hill on the west side of the hollow, that is, on the present site of LaSalle Street, farmers could reach the riverside even when the river was in flood. The hills and hollows around Elsie were covered with trees which Greene could cut and sell for riverboat fuel and other purposes. The occupation of woodcutter was at the time one of the common ones along the river, as Mark Twain's books, and even Mrs. Trollope's *DOMESTIC MANNERS AMONG THE AMERICANS* will attest.

Above the bar formed by Askew Creek, the river channel cut close enough to the Illinois shore to enable steamboats to reach the bank with comparative ease. Lack of this advantage probably prevented an early town from growing up at Lockhaven, several miles downstream, though that site had the advantage of a broad valley well above flood stage. The town of Randolph, which did exist for a time in this valley formed by Piasa Creek, was well back from the river.

Addison Greene probably never owned the land on which his log house stood. At least there is no record of it. That end of Elsie had been bought from the United States land office at Edwardsville in 1827 by James Mason, who founded Grafton. Mason later sold it to General Semple, in the fall of 1852, just prior to the founding of the village. What rights Greene had in Elsie are not clear. His name appears on a few early documents with that of General Semple, making it appear that he was more than a squatter, perhaps leasing land and cutting rights from Mason.

The valley as Greene first saw it must have shown the same beauty as other uninhabited hollows along the river exhibit. In early and mid April it probably bloomed profusely with a wide variety of now rare and vanished wildflowers, just as Spring Valley, in Chautauqua, still does. Its numerous springs provided plenty of water to tempt settlement.

In locating his house as strategically as he did, Greene apparently enclosed one spring, which still flows at the bottom of a well behind the Riverview House. The house allowed enough room for a road only between it and the west bluff. It was put back from the river enough to raise it above the level of the high flood of 1846.

The Greenes didn't remain in Elsie long, moving to their farm in Mississippi Township (in Dow) about 1854. One might assume that the wood trade he was engaged in was no longer practical when General Semple had bought the land and was moving forward with the building of a



Addison and Amanda Greene. This portrait comes from Edna Rieger, of the Alton-Jerseyville Road, Elsie Township, a granddaughter of the pictured couple.

town. As a young married couple, the Greenses were probably looking for a permanent place to settle down. It was natural and prudent of them to find land in the rich soil of the Dow area, and the fact that they stayed there the rest of their lives indicates that they were satisfied with this move.

How Addison Green happened to come to Jersey Landing in the first place is a question. Some parts of the answer might be put together from information given in his and his father's histories, printed below. Again, speculation must play a part in our reconstruction, but the dates involved in Addison's movements reflect the changes in fortune of his family, and of the Mormons in the midwest, for he grew up in a Mormon family in a time when it was dangerous and often anguishing to be a Mormon. He himself apparently broke with the Mormon church, unlike his older brother, Evan, who followed his father in being a stalwart member of the early church in the west.

Addison had been born in 1819. His father became a follower of Joseph Smith in 1832, shortly thereafter meeting the Mormon Prophet in Kirtland, Ohio. This was only a year after Smith had first attempted to build his Zion there. At the time, Addison, of course, was only thirteen. His teenage years must have been ones of great disruption, owing to his father's strong devotion to his new faith which had resulted in family migrations and dangers, and his father's frequent and extended absence on missionary journeys (See his father's history, below).

It is obvious that Addison was close to the core of the early Mormon church. His father had married a sister of Brigham Young. His elder brother, Evan, was commended by Joseph Smith and other principal Mormons for his faithfulness and justice, and devoted much of his life to the Mormon cause, eventually migrating to Utah by ox team, but only when Young ordered him to do so in 1852. It would appear that Addison was in the thick of the unrest in Missouri, in which the Mormons were severely tried, losing some thirty-eight lives. He was living with his family when the Mormons were expelled from Clay County, and later was apparently present in the vicinity of Far West, Missouri at the time of the "Mormon War," probably participating in the general retreat to Illinois in 1839. Though the two records printed below, one written by the devout Evan Greene, the other apparently gotten from Addison shortly before 1885, do not agree in every particular, enough agreement exists to allow the likelihood of these speculations. While the short biography of Greene in the JERSEY COUNTY ATLAS of 1872 mentions his Mormon background, by 1885 it had disappeared from the record. It would seem likely that this was Addison Greene's desire.

When Greene married, on April 15, 1839, he was twenty years old. According to THE HISTORY OF JERSEY AND GREENE COUNTIES (Springfield, 1885),



Addison and Amanda Greene in front of their farmhouse in Mississippi Township. Picture courtesy of Edna Rieger.

he lived in Quincy until November, 1844. It may well be, however, that he was near Nauvoo. At least he was in close contact with the family. This is suggested by the fact that his father wrote "to all my dear children in Ill." from Buffalo, New York, in February, 1843, when on one of his missionary journeys. He began his letter, "I now write to you all as one, and direct to Addison." Since his family was settled at Nauvoo, this might suggest an immediate family proximity. The date of November, 1844, assigned by the 1885 history to his arrival in Madison County would suggest that he left the family shortly after his father's death in September.

The abovementioned letter may give us a further clue. Apparently in 1843 John Greene was worried about the state of his son's faith, writing, "Oh! my son! if you could feel for me as I do for you, you would be steady, study your book and live a Christian, and by so doing, you would add to your father's comfort, and instead of bringing down my gray hairs to the grave with sorrow, you would anoint my head with the oil of gladness and fill my heart with unspeakable joy."

At any rate, wherever he was in the mid 1840's, Addison Greene's arrival at Jersey Landing in 1847 coincides with the beginning Brigham Young's great trek from Illinois to Salt Lake City, a migration in which some of the Greene family participated. The years of 1844-47 were very trying ones for the Illinois Mormons. Unrest in Nauvoo after the murder of Joseph Smith was rampant. Splinter groups formed. Many people fell away. Armed conflict with the gentiles, as the non-Mormons were termed, recurred. The Mormons themselves grew more militant. Addison Greene dropped away from his Mormon connections sometime in those years.

Family tradition says he left because of a disagreement with Brigham Young. For whatever reason, it is interesting to see that the first citizen of Elsay must have found in the small valley by the river a real respite from the turmoil of the Mormon experience in Illinois. The fact that he lived in the vicinity for the rest of his life seems to indicate that he was satisfied to farm and raise his family in the comparative quiet of rural Jersey County.

From the point of view of an Elsay historian, it surely adds interest and drama to the story of its first citizen that his youth was tied in with one of the truly unusual chapters in American history.

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From HEF member Norman Greene comes this sketch of his grandfather, John P. Greene, written by his uncle, Evan Greene, in 1857.

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John Portineus Greene was born Sept. 3rd 1793 in Herkimer, Herkimer County, New York. At the early age of 19, on February 11, 1813 he married Rhoda Young, daughter of John Young and Abigail (Nabby) Howe, born September 10, 1789, at Platawa District, New York.

About two years after his marriage, having much

impaired his health by incessant labour in chopping and clearing land, he took up shoemaking in which occupation he was very successful, resorting to it at different times in after years as a means of support for his family. At an early date he became a member of the Methodist Episcopal Church. And for several years he held an Exhorter's license. But not being satisfied with their travels and improvements in Spiritual things, when the Methodist perfection would be manifested, he joined them, and traveled about three years preaching the gospel according to the light he had received. Not realizing his hopes, or finding that for which his soul panted, he, in connection with some twenty or twenty-five others, in 1828, united and formed the Methodist Protestant Church, continuing as a traveling preacher in that connection until he received the gospel of Jesus Christ and the new Covenant of the last days.

He was baptised April, 1832, by Elder Eleazer Miller, in Mendon, Monroe County, New York. After he was confirmed the promise of the Father was verified, and he spake with new tongues and prophesied. He was shortly thereafter ordained an Elder, under the hands of Elder Eleazer Miller, and commenced preaching the gospel in a more perfect way. Wherever he went the fire kindled, and many embracing the gospel received the ordinance of baptism under his administration. His labors that season were chiefly in Monroe, Livingston, Genesee, Allegany, and Catarangus Counties. In Warsaw, Genesee County, he assisted in baptizing and organizing a branch of twenty to thirty members.

In October, 1832, he moved to Kirtland, Ohio, where he first became acquainted with the Prophet, Joseph Smith, Jr., and from their first acquaintance he was an intimate friend of the Prophet. In the spring of 1833 he was appointed by the Council to preside over the branch at Parkman, where he moved with his family and stayed until fall, when he removed again to Kirtland. Subsequently he was sent to the East, visiting the branches through the western part of New York and into Canada, to gather means for the Lord's house, returning to Kirtland on October 21st, 1833.

February 25th, 1834, he received letters of commendation from the hands of Joseph Smith, Jr., taking a mission with Sidney Rigdon again into Western New York and Canada to gather men and means for the redemption of Zion. He returned to Kirtland and was there when the Camp started, and then returned and spent the fall and winter working at his trade for the benefit of his family. On May 18th, 1835, he left Kirtland on a mission to the East, travelling the State of New York generally over, visiting the branches in Connecticut, and going on to Rhode Island and Boston, Massachusetts. He attended a conference at Bradford, Massachusetts on August 7th, Dover, New Hampshire on September 4th, Sacco, Maine on September 18th, Farmington, Maine on October 2nd, and then returned to Kirtland sometime in the winter.

March 30th, 1836, he received letters of commendation from Joseph Smith, Jr., and spent the fore part of the year in gathering means to finish the house of the Lord, etc., among the branches of the church in Ohio. July 13th he started on a mission to the East, again

visiting the branches in New York and returning to Kirtland September 15th. He spent the winter in Kirtland and in visiting the branches south of Ohio. He was a firm supporter of the measures of the President, Joseph Smith, Jr., this and the following season. He stayed in Kirtland until November 16th, 1837, when he started on a mission to Canada in company with William Marks, returning to Kirtland in January of 1838. In February, 1838, he started with his family and moved to Far West, Missouri, and was there through the persecutions of that season and endured all the troubles, privations, and labors in common with the rest of the Saints in that region. When Joseph and Hyrum Smith and others had been given up and General Clark called on the brethren to lay down their arms, he, in company with Lorenzo D. Young, Phineas H. Young and son, and others on the 1st of November committed their families and friends to the care of our Father in Heaven and took to the wilderness. On the 15th of the same month the arrived at the house of Judge Cleaveland, four miles east of Quincy, Illinois, and as requestions had been made by the authorities of Missouri for him and others, the following week they passed over to Exeter, in Scott County, Illinois, where he unexpectedly found his son, Evan M. Greene and family. Soon after he returned to Quincy, Illinois, and found his family just arrived from Far West, as there had been a general break-up and the Saints were all fleeing for their lives. He remained at Quincy during the winter, and when Joseph and Hyrum had obtained their liberty and arrived in Quincy (1839), a conference was held at which he was appointed a delegate to visit Cincinnati, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, and New York City and represent the persecutions and conditions of the Saints. He started on the 5th of June to fill this mission.

While on this mission he gathered considerable means for the relief of the Saints. While at Cincinnati, Ohio, he published a pamphlet of 32 pages, containing an account of the rupture in Missouri, printed and circulated 3,000 to 5,000 copies, visited the above cities and many intermediate places and branches of the church, and returned to Quincy on October 27th, finding his wife very sick with inflammatory rheumatism, occasioned by her exposure in removing from Missouri in the fall of 1838. He spent the winter in Quincy, and in the spring of 1840 he moved to Nauvoo (then Commerce) where he remained labouring unceasingly for the gathering of the Saints and the building of the Kingdom of Heaven, taking care of his wife, who was confined to her room and mostly to her bed until her death, which happened the 18th of January, 1841. They had lived happily together twenty-eight years and raised seven children, including three sons (Evan Melbourne, Addison, and John Young) and four daughters (Abby Ann, Fanny Eliza, Rhoda, and Nancy Zerviah). They were fond and affectionate in their youth and lived happily together through all the changing scenes they had passed, and now he felt her loss severely.

December 6th, 1841, he was married to Mary Eliza Nelson, his second wife, by whom he had one child, a daughter, Mary Emma. On August 30th, 1842, he received a letter of commendation from the hands of Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, and G. A. Smith and started on a mission to the

East. On this mission he visited many of the branches in Ohio and New York and returned to Nauvoo on October 19, 1843, having been gone thirteen months. On December 23rd, he was chosen Marshall of the City of Nauvoo, and assessor and collector of the 4th ward of said city, which office he held until the time of his death. March 25th, 1844, he was received into the Priesthood Quorum in the Kingdom of God. June 10th, on order of the Mayor, by virtue of the City Council declaring the office of the Expositor, together with the press, type, and fixtures, a nuisance, he proceeded with a posse to abate said nuisance. During the excitement and trouble that followed, he was constantly at his post and efficient in all his duties as Marshall, and stood shoulder to shoulder with the Mayor.

On the night of the 20th, he with the Mayor, Joseph Smith, General Hyrum Smith, and Captain Jonathan Dunham, left the city secretly, passed over into Iowa, where they remained until the 23rd in the afternoon, when they returned to the city. The morning of the 24th he started in company with Joseph Smith and Hyrum for Carthage to give themselves up to the state authorities, and on the 25th underwent a mock trial in company with them and others. On the 27th he was ordered by the governor to go to Nauvoo to see that order was kept when he, the governor, should come in, he having pledged himself and the faith of the state to protect Joseph and Hyrum and bring them with him to Nauvoo. John P. Greene was at his post of duty when the governor came in and upbraided him for not keeping his promise. On the morning of the 28th the news of the massacre came into the city. He was aroused and was one of the first to visit Joseph's wife, Emma. From this feeble constitution sank down rapidly, and on the 10th of September following he departed this life, aged 51 years and 7 days, having been an incessant laborer in the Kingdom of God 12 years and 5 months. He was beloved by all his friends, and respected by all who knew him.

1 *ENCYCLOPEDIA AMERICANA* notes as follows (1963 ed.): "Polygamy had been secretly recorded as a revelation in 1843 (DOCTRINE AND COVENANTS, sec. 132), and although it was not publicly announced until 1852 in Utah, it was practiced in Illinois. An opposition arose which rejected plural marriage and criticized church financial policy and church government, which was becoming increasingly centralized. Joseph Smith, now church president and mayor, ordered the press of the opposition Nauvoo EXPOSITOR destroyed by members of the Nauvoo Legion, a trained and uniformed Mormon militia. This action inflamed the already explosive gentile (non-Mormon) opposition greatly exercised over Mormon growth and participation in politics."

## MEETING PLANNED

Historic Elsay Foundation will hold an open meeting for members and friends in the Village Hall on Monday evening, March 31st, at 8 p.m. At this meeting we will discuss plans for the future, some projected projects, and ideas from those attending. A movie of the great Mississippi River flood of 1973 as it affected Elsay will also be shown. Please come.

## ADDISON AND NATHANIEL GREENE

THE HISTORY OF JERSEY AND GREENE COUNTIES, published in Springfield, Illinois, in 1885, by the Continental Historical Company, included the following short biographies of Addison Greene and his son, Nathaniel:

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Addison Greene settled at Jersey Landing, Jersey county, Ill., about the year 1847. Five years later he removed to Mississippi township, where he has ever since resided. He was born in Jefferson county, N. Y., June 21, 1819. In 1834 he went to Missouri, where he remained three years, then returned east to Ohio, his parents having removed to that state. Eighteen months later he came to Illinois, locating in Madison county. He resided there about 15 months, then went to Missouri, and five months later to Quincy, Ill., remaining there from Feb., 1839, till Nov., 1844. At the latter date he returned to Madison county, where he lived three years, coming then to this county. April 15, 1839, he was married in Scott county, Ill., to Amanda Hoit, daughter of Benjamin and Dorothy (Walker) Hoit. Mr. Greene's marriage license was the first one issued in that county. They had a family of 12 children--Henrietta, born July 3, 1840, married to James Chaplin, and died in Feb., 1871; John P., born Aug. 23, 1841, and died in June, 1845; Amanda, born in 1843, and died in 1845; Rufus A., born in March, 1845, and died in Oct. of the same year; Rhoda A., born in Dec., 1846, married to John Sanders, and died in Oct., 1871; Albert, born March 23, 1848, and died in May, 1872; Addison, born in Dec., 1850, and died in 1874; Ella, born in 1852, and died in 1856; Joan, born April 20, 1854, now the wife of B. A. McCaully, of Kansas; Nathaniel, born Jan. 22, 1857, living in Mississippi township; Nancy Z., born May 20, 1861, now the wife of John W. Morrill, of Kansas; and Frederick F., born in 1863, and died in infancy. Mr. Greene has a farm of 300 acres, all of which is on section 31, except 80 acres on section 30. He has made substantial and comfortable improvements, and is an enterprising farmer. Mr. Greene was elected supervisor of Mississippi township at its organization, and served two years. He is politically a democrat.

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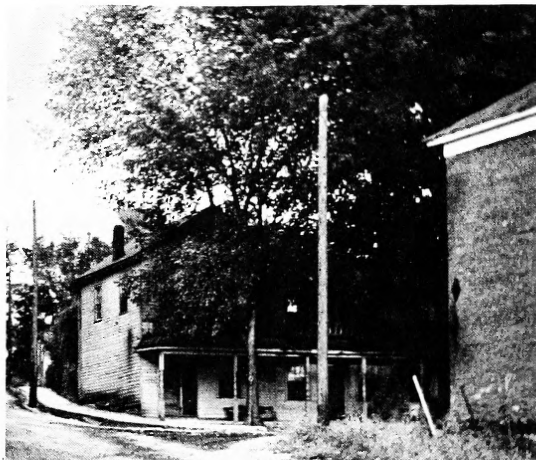
Nathaniel Greene, son of Addison Greene, resides upon section 31, Mississippi township. He was born on the same section, Jan. 20, 1857, and here grew to manhood. His childhood was spent in working on the farm attending the district school. In 1872 he entered Monticello Seminary, in Lewis county, Mo., and remained a student at that institution nine months, after which he attended four months at Blackburn University, in Macoupin county, Ill. In 1876, he took a trip to Pennsylvania, visiting the Centennial exposition, at Philadelphia, and also the oil regions. On his return home he worked on the farm with his father, until 1878, when he again visited Pennsylvania, where he was married,

in Dec. of that year, to Belle Kilgore, who was a native of Mineral township, Venango Co., Penn., who was born March 3d, 1857. She is the daughter of James and Nancy (Kennear) Kilgore. He returned home in Feb., 1879, and during the next four years followed farming upon his father's place, and also canvassed Jersey and Calhoun counties for the sale of agricultural implements, being employed by Drury and Weed, of Alton.<sup>1</sup> In Nov., 1882, he went to Elsah, and opened a store of groceries, provisions and hardware. He continued in this business until August, 1883. In the fall of that year he went south with a party of surveyors, and remained two months, surveying on the Mississippi river from Vicksburg to Natches. He then returned home. In Aug., 1884, he went to Cloud county, Kansas, and there engaged in the manufacture of the Norris patent fence, which he continued three months, then returned to the farm, where he has since remained. He has held the office of school director two terms, and is at the present time president of the board of school trustees of Mississippi township. He is a member of the Grafton lodge, No. 341, of the A. F. & A. M., also a charter member of Black Cross lodge, No. 106, of the K. of P., of Elsah.<sup>2</sup> He is politically a democrat. Mr. and Mrs. Greene have two children--Ruth, born Feb. 12, 1881, and Addison, born June 5, 1884.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Drury and Weed still maintains a hardware business on Broadway, in Alton, across from the flour mills.

<sup>2</sup> The K. P. Hall, in Elsah, subsequently the Methodist Recreation Hall, is now being refurbished for use as an antique shop.

<sup>3</sup> Norman Greene, another son of Nathaniel Greene, was born subsequent to the above biography. HEF is indebted to him for much information on the history of his family.



## CHRIS ROSS ON BLUFF ECOLOGY

Chris Ross has recently completed an interesting historical investigation of the disappearance of the native prairie in the Elsay area for the Biology Department at Principia College. Chris's studies, using old photographs, interviews, maps, and personal investigation, focuses chiefly on the Mississippi River bluffs.

His investigation documents the rather alarming rate at which the bluff prairies, featured in HEF's leaflet # 2, by Marilyn Bland, are disappearing.

During the early period of Elsay's settlement, a number of influences kept the brush and woods out of the prairies. These included heavy woodcutting for steamboat fuel and railroad ties, recurrent fires, and grazing on the bluffs. But the cessation of these activities as well as other influences have caused increasing encroachment of the woods on the remaining prairie.

One of Chris's most interesting findings relates to the small junipers (*Juniperus virginiana*) which are native to the prairies. These trees grow so slowly that a stump eight inches in diameter may contain two hundred annual rings. They are also almost impervious to rot. Consequently not only are they widely used for fence posts but their stumps may remain for unusual lengths of time with little apparent change.

Chris has found old juniper stumps in the deep woods well back from the river, indicating that these areas may well be former prairie. He has also noted a stump high on the bluffs upriver from Elsay where the "three pagodas" were built as a part of the Piasa Bluffs summer community in 1891. Though the summer lookouts are long gone, the stump remains looking about the same as it did in pictures of the pagodas dating about sixty or seventy years old. Chris believes that the junipers were all cut off the bluffs in that area for use as fence posts over a hundred years ago. A number of these posts may still be found in the woods with little but surface rot after perhaps over a century.

This may mean that some of the present juniper stumps supported trees when Marquette and Joliet paddled by in 1673. Clearly a careful study of the bluff junipers ought to be made.

## PUBLICATIONS AVAILABLE

HEF has a backlog of publications that frequently come in demand. Below is a listing of these publications:

ELSAH HISTORY: Numbers 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11 are available at 25 cents each, plus 15 cents postage, if it is needed.

Leaflets: #1 THE MAYBECK PILOT at 25 cents, plus 15 cents postage.

#2 ELSAH CITIZENS at 50 cents, plus 20 cents postage.

#3 ELSAH BLUFF PRAIRIES, by Marilyn Bland, at 75 cents, plus 20 cents postage.

#4 THE GREAT RIVER: MASTER SCULP-

The new spot drawing on the banner of ELSAH HISTORY was provided for us by Sue Olsen, an art student at Principia College.

## LARRY GROCE'S CONCERT

Larry Groce delighted the audiences of two benefit concerts he gave for Historic Elsay Foundation on February 14th and 15th. Ably accompanied by the versatile Berke McKelvey, who provided a groundwork of electric bass for most numbers, Larry sang about twenty-five songs each night, most of them his own.

Old Groce favorites included his "On a whistling afternoon," "The Bumper Sticker Song (brought up to date)," "The Ballad of Sam and Juanita," in which he invited the audience to sing along, and "Junk Food Junkie."

A bit of Groce philosophy of life entered the concerts with his song about the shopping malls taking over the country ("We've been mailed").

Charlie McMillan helped out with his banjo on "Cripple Creek," "Darlin' Corey," and "The Old Groundhog." Larry himself played banjo while singing the familiar favorite, "Old Dog Blue."

Larry, who is now living in Phillipi, West Virginia, in the heart of the blue-grass country, sang several songs accompanied by his lap dulcimer, including "Yellow is the color of my true love's hair," "Shady Grove," and a medley of old favorites.

Another original and very strange song, "The Curse," tells the mountain story of a backwoods bridegroom cursed at his marriage to find the next morning that his wife is aged and dead. Larry rendered this with special power.

Larry revised local geography, relocating some rivers, in a fine song called "Calhoun County." He closed his concerts with "I gotta give thanks," and on Saturday a reading of a poem, "First Flight," by a West Virginia poet, Louise McNeil, from her book PARADOX HILL. The poem praises the child's sense of wonder and imagination, a sense Larry Groce has preserved into adulthood.

Historic Elsay Foundation is grateful to Larry Groce for giving us these evenings of entertainment, and for the funds they brought to HEF for use in projects for the benefit of Elsay.

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TOR, by Percival Robertson, at \$1.50, postpaid.

ELSAH: A HISTORIC GUIDEBOOK, 3rd edition, at \$2.50, postpaid.

Other Items: Postcards of Riverview House, at 10 cents each, plus postage, unless sent with other items.

Sylvester souvenir, showing a full-color reproduction of a F. O. Sylvester riverscape with information inside, at 25 cents, plus 10 cents postage.

DON'T FORGET. CONTRIBUTIONS TO HISTORIC ELSAH FOUNDATION ARE TAX DEDUCTIBLE NOW.